Charlotte Regional Office Counseling

Peace of Mind
Stop Suffering in Silence

by Lori Fox, Counseling Supervisor

Recent headlines have been filled with reports of people struggling with thoughts and feelings so painful and terrible, they are compelled to act in unimaginable ways. Now, our own community is reeling from the tragic deaths of two little girls and the unfathomable pain of a beloved family. We are left to wonder how this could happen. While there will never be an answer that truly explains these horrible acts, perhaps we can take this time to be reminded of the importance of breaking the chains of silence and taking steps to escape the despair of depression.

Speak. People feel there is nowhere to turn, no one who will understand what they are going through. They may feel ashamed and scared by what is happening to them. These are the "lies" that depression tells us and they are absolutely not true. Silence feeds feelings of helplessness. Solitude in dealing with problems can lead to loss of hope. There are tremendous resources available when someone reaches out and simply says, "I need help." Tell a friend or loved one, a priest, a helpline operator. Start by allowing others to know you are in pain and need support.

When is it time to get help? The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 9.5 percent of Americans suffer from a depressive disorder. The symptoms of depression include: depressed (sad or empty) mood, loss of pleasure, appetite disturbance, sleep disturbance, either restlessness or feeling slowed down and heavy, loss of energy, feeling worthless or preoccupied by guilt, difficulty concentrating, thoughts of death and dying. If left untreated or in more extreme cases, there may be thoughts of suicide, delusions (false beliefs) or even hallucinations (experiencing something through sight, sound, or other senses that is not really there).

What can help?

- **Medications.** The balance of our brain's chemistry is extremely important to our sense of wellbeing. When there is an imbalance, our moods will be affected. There are numerous medications available now which can make a huge difference in bringing that brain chemistry into harmony. Are there side effects? Yes, but many side effects are temporary and not as noticeable when one becomes used to the medications. If medications in the past have been less than helpful, do not give up. No one "pill" works for everyone and sometimes it takes a careful combination of medications to get it right. Also, be aware that it may take several weeks for certain medications to build up to a "therapeutic level", the point where a person can start to really feel a difference. All of this should be discussed with one's physician. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who is specially trained in this department.
- **Professional Counseling**. Through talk therapy, we are able to explore feelings and beliefs in a confidential and supportive environment. There can be great relief in having a place to "bring" problems and have help in making real changes.
- **Spirituality.** Depression can also impact how a person is feeling spiritually, leading one to question faith and even God and come up with empty answers. However, the reverse is also true: spiritual beliefs and experiencing closeness to God can bring comfort, hope, and empowerment in dealing with depression. Consider speaking with a priest, spiritual advisor, or a prayer partner.

Timing is important. Don't wait. Don't let the pain worsen and deepen. Thoughts and feelings go hand in hand. Just as negative thoughts create dark feelings, dark feelings create negative thoughts. It's important not to wait until these thoughts and feelings start to affect behavior. Many people who decide to speak up and get help regret not having done it sooner.

The counseling team at Catholic Social Services is available to help people who are dealing with depression and other issues. We offer professional counseling in a faith based setting. We are affordable, accept most health insurance, and can provide a sliding scale based on income. Please call Lori Fox at 704-370-3238 to schedule an appointment, or visit our website at www.cssnc.org.

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